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She's the Jazz: An Exploration of Dance and Society in the Age of the Flapper

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SHE'S THE JAZZ:

AN EXPLORATION OF DANCE AND SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF THE FLAPPER

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts

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By

Jillian C. Terry

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CE/T Committee:

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I dedicate this written thesis to my parents, Samuel Robert and Christy Terry, who have supported me wholly with unfailing love in every adventure along the way.

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My work would not be possible without the educators who have instilled in me a passion for learning and creating. Thank you to Charlene Martin for assigning your Pre-AP Literature class to read *The Great Gatsby*; to Lora Jane (Hyden) Rice for inspiring me to pursue dance in higher education at WKU; to Meghen McKinley for having me embody choreographers throughout history and for sitting in the hallway to help with the agonizing decisions associated with costuming six dancers in period wear; to Kylene Stephens for teaching me what a strong woman is capable of speaking; to my second reader, Anna Patsfall, for fostering a love for dance history and for creating an assignment which inspired me to learn more about the context of dance and choreography within society; to my committee chair, Amanda Clark, for introducing me to jazz dance history, and for her mentorship, guidance, revisions, confidence, and witty banter.

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Thank you to my parents who have paid for countless dance lessons, tickets, and hotel rooms, and never once questioned my pursuits of dance in higher education.

Finally, thank you to my friends for their encouragement, distractions, and kind words along the way. I could not have made it this far without your support, laughter, open ears, and protein breaks.

ABSTRACT

The 1920's, most affectionately known as "The Roaring Twenties," was a time of dramatic social and political change. Economic growth pushed Americans into an unfamiliar consumer society where people bought the same goods, heard the same songs, danced the same dances, and used the same slang. Prohibition laws led to the underground sale of alcohol in speakeasies where new freedoms were found through communities uniting in music and dance. Here we saw the emergence of flappers. Unlike the generations that came before, these women were seen performing unladylike actions, such as drinking and smoking, while embracing their sexuality. While not all women were flappers, the culture and politics of the era provided new freedoms enjoyed by all females. My research examines the connections between dance and society in the 1920s to uncover how one affected the other. I have delineated the roles which women took on before and after the first world war to discover how they affected society and how dance played a role in their liberation. I then utilized this research to influence my choreography and discover how looking to history for inspiration can create new and interesting movements and topics still relevant today.

VITA

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PRESENTATIONS

Terry, Jillian. "She's the Jazz: 'Back to Charleston' and 'Her Perfect.'"
Choreography presented in *Contemporary Connections: A Dance Research Showcase.* Bowling Green, KY, April 2019.

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Freshman year of high school. 2012. Third Period. Pre-AP Literature. I was assigned to read F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby." The cover depicted a dark, blue-washed cityscape, covered by a woman's facial features and a pair of glasses. The inside painted a picture of mystery, luxury, love, and energy. I began to take interest in the 1920s as a whole. The Charleston was a regular part of my vocabulary as a dancer and fan of musical theatre, but I took interest in more than the dance. I fell in love with the style, the fashion, and the aesthetic of the period. I fell in love with the flapper, though I never really knew her whole story.

Second year of college. First Semester. 2017. Tuesday/Thursday 2:20-3:50. Dance History. I was assigned to write a historical context essay. The goal of this essay was to take a piece of choreography and place it within the time it was created. I chose the dream ballet from the 2014 revival of the musical *On The Town*. I had experienced this production firsthand during the summer before my senior year of high school and fell in love. After researching the history behind the show and its creation, I fell even more in love with the story that was told through dance, especially in this scene where no words were spoken or sung; it was solely movement which told the story. I suddenly became intrigued with how choreography could be influenced by what was going on in the world at the time of its creation.

Second year of college. Second Semester. 2018. Tuesday/Thursday 12:45-2:05. Choreography I. I was apprehensive about being graded on my ability to create. Millions of pieces of choreography have been created throughout time; how could I even begin to

create something worth the time of an audience? Throughout the semester, as I learned the mechanics, components, and elements of choreography, I started to find my voice as a creator. My final piece for the semester was a character study on the infamous Zodiac Killer. I utilized research and choreographic elements to create a character, movement vocabulary, and stylistic qualities that I felt portrayed the attitude and uncertainty of his story. I discovered that I love to tell stories through movement, but to take it further, I love creating and showcasing a character and his specific story through movement.

The very same semester. Monday/Wednesday 11:30-1:35. Jazz V. As a part of our curriculum, we studied jazz dance throughout the decades. We began with the early 1900s and the vernacular dance movements which were taken from African movements and styles practiced by slaves on plantations. From there we learned the choreography from a video of a dance troupe performing a piece of 1920s movements. It was astounding how different the movement was from what we practice today. I was intrigued by the dancer's individuality, personality, energy, and overall performance. I could not stop patting, slapping, and kicking.

Again, the very same semester. Advising meeting. What was I going to do for my Honors Capstone Experience/Thesis? I looked back on topics and ideas that had interested me throughout my course studies as well as my dance training and education as a whole. When realizing that the topics above were all in my mix of possible projects, I decided to combine them. Thus, "She's the Jazz: An Exploration of Dance and Society in the Age of the Flapper" was born. With the year 2020 in sight, I felt it was the perfect time to look back one hundred years in the past and discover how I could use this

research to influence my work, develop my choreographic voice, and see how history can influence new and relevant topics in dance performance.

The Birth of an Era

The year 1920 is said to have not only set the tone for the next decade, but for the whole century to follow. The Treaty of Versailles ended World War 1 in June of 1919, and after five years of fighting, this was the first full year without war. Americans were conflicted. They felt joy over the war's end but were left devastated by the thought of what had happened in the years prior. Sadness lingered as citizens began to feel that the century could then begin without interruption. They had optimism. As stated by Author Eric Burns,

> They were enthusiastic, though, and about something else in the air, the beat of distant music, music that had never been heard before, making those who felt it celebratory, eager to twist their bodies into contortions new and lascivious, unable to sit still.[1]

This enthusiasm foreshadowed the social dance craze that would soon sweep the nation.

Radical expression in the arts sought to tell more than just stories. It demanded profound meanings and answers to the most vexing questions in the soul of society and its people. The arts showed rebellion in politics, culture, and the premises of society.[2] The counteractive force of this artistic revolution was the invention of American mass media. The power couple of the radio and the newspaper would then broadcast matters unimportant to the public, but entertaining, nonetheless. Private lives of actors, musicians, athletes, actors, royalty, and many others were shared and consumed in a way

1. Eric Burns, introduction to *1920: The Year That Made the Decade Roar*, (New York: Pegasus Books, 2015), xi-xii.

2. Burns, xvi.

that made the formerly irrelevant and common happenings of life a spectacle.[3] It was in the 1920s that idea of the celebrity was born. The same mass communication channels, including movies and television, that would create the celebrity would also prove to be important players in the social dance craze, as people across the country would watch the same movies, listen to the same music, and dance the same dances.

By the turn of the century, dance on stage had already begun to influence appearances and beauty norms through advertisements of the Ziegfeld Girl selection process. Florence Ziegfeld produced *Follies of 1907* as inexpensive entertainment for the summer Broadway season, and afterward, realizing its success and potential, attached his name to it.[4] Productions of *The Ziegfeld Follies* ran annually on Broadway from 1907 to 1931. The biggest event of these productions was the showgirls. Along with some of the best in American dancing, singing, and comedy, the performers of director Florence Ziegfeld's dance troupe, the Ziegfeld Girls, represented an art deemed the "presentation of female beauty" and "American popular culture at its core."[5]

The selection process for the famous Ziegfeld Girls was a major topic of publicity for the Ziegfeld name. According to an interview with former Ziegfeld Girls, for the quarter of the century that the Follies was produced, around 15,000 beautiful women

3. Burns, xvi.

4. "Ziegfeld Follies," *PBS*, http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/ziegfeld-follies/.

5. James Traub, *The Devil's Playground A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square* (New York: Random House, 2004), 32-26, quoted in Ralph G. Giordano, *Satan in the Dance Hall: Rev. John Roach Straton, Social Dancing, and Morality in 1920s New York City* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2008), 57-58.

interviewed each year, but only 3,000 total were chosen as Ziegfeld Girls.[6] Press releases about the audition process nationalized its criteria and created a beauty expert label for Ziegfeld himself as detailed by author Linda Mizejewski who states,

> The national reputation of the Follies, combined with the deluge of press releases on the selection and audition process, produced Ziegfeld as a prime national expert on female beauty, the wily industrialist on par with Henry Ford or Thomas Edison, processing national resources into glossy display items.[7]

Florence Ziegfeld had always chosen girls with distinct and recognizably American features, which made his Ziegfeld Girls the definition of American beauty.

A short upper lip and dainty nose characterized the Ziegfeld girl in every magazine. While their hair colors differed, and some were even described as having an irregular nose, they each had that distinguishingly American trait of the short upper lip. Political cartoons of the time often portrayed women with differing features, more specifically characterizing the features of those of different races as being larger than life, such as monkeys with a large upper lip.[8] During the time when immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and the migration of African American slaves freed from southern states challenged the ideas of American identity, the Ziegfeld Girl was an example of how the national white race was being defined on sexual lines. Women were encouraged to learn their types and be aware of their body measurements in comparison to Ziegfeld's

6. Douglas Martin, "Former Ziegfeld Follies Girl Recalls the Glory Days," *New York Times* (New York, NY), October 18, 1996.

7. Linda Mizejewski, "Racialized, Glorified American Girls," in *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999), 112.

8. Mizejewski, 109.

preferences of 36 – 26 – 38 (bust – waist – hips.)[9] Those who bore the correct measurements with the willingness and ability to flaunt them were chosen as the staple of American beauties.

Florence Ziegfeld's showgirls and his publicized selection process began to display an influential relationship between dance and society before the post-war era of the 1920s introduced new and controversial topics in dance. Throughout this thesis you will discover more about the relationships between dance, society, and women, and how they affected one another during the 1920s. Chapter One details the history of the most popularly practiced social dancing of the era, as well as society's reactions and acceptances of these new movement styles and practices. Chapter Two details the changes women sought in the post-war era, as well as a study of 1920s youth, specifically the flapper, and how these youth shaped society. Chapter Three then details my process of taking influence from this research to create choreographic works including both literal and abstract interpretations of the movements and ideas of the era. I hope that through this exploration of the 1920s you will gain new insight into history that will influence your life and work in the present.

9. Douglas Martin.

CHAPTER ONE- DANCE AND SOCIETY

Dance in the 1920s can be described as fast-paced, energetic, and free. Its quick, syncopated rhythms not only reflect jazz music, popular of the era, but the tempo of society in a new age of growth and exploration. Many recognize its style as unique to the era, but the jazz age dance craze did not take root in a twentieth century social boom. Historians have found claim to its movements across the world, and each has a truth to its argument. But while its origins are diverse, it is America that produced and made famous the Charleston dance craze that we know today. Its popularity spread through social venues and stages across America and across the world. Many took pleasure and indulged in the dance, while others took opposition, some in extreme measures almost unfathomable to a dancer of today. Even with its opposers, dance was, without doubt, an integral aspect of society in the 1920s.

The Charleston

Dance historians have found multiple opinions on where to give credit for this dance craze. Though America did not see the Charleston until the 1920s, dance historian Fredrick Kaigh states that, "The children of Africa were doing the Charleston before Julius Caesar has so much as heard of Britain…"[10] On the other hand, Leo Staats, former director of the ballet of the Paris Opera, states in a 1926 *New York Times* article, "…the Charleston of today is basically the Branle of the sixteenth century with a few frills added."[11] The explanation for these opposing viewpoints lies in America, where African

10. Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Da Capo 1994), 13.

11. Fred Austin, "The Charleston Traces Its Ancestry Back 400 Years," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1926, Magazine Section, SM2.

dances cross-pollinated with European stylistic influences while slaves worked and danced on plantations. As slaves were emancipated and explored new freedoms of travel and work, their dance habits traveled with them. Historians credit its name "the Charleston" to Charleston, SC where African American dockworkers would practice the dance.[12] Some even trace the movement specifically to the Gullah culture on the Sea Islands off the Charleston coast.

The Charleston movement can also be traced to roots in tribal and ritual African dance movements, as with its popular vernacular jazz dance predecessors such as The Turkey Trot and Cake Walk that were seen performed by slaves on plantations. Largely noted influences of African dance include the use of polyrhythmic movements, the juxtaposition of various rhythms, and the wild articulation of the knees. These characteristics bare resemblance to various tribal dances including an Obolo dance from the Ibo tribe in West Africa, the King Sailor Dance of Trinidad, and the Batuque from the Cape Verde Islands and Portuguese Guinea in West Africa.[13] The famous slapping, noise bearing aspect of the Charleston called patting is traced to the African Juba or Giouba which featured two dance challengers while others slapped their thighs, stamped their feet, and clapped their hands to keep time and encourage the dancers.

Rhythmic similarities are only one of many comparisons to the Charleston's African roots. Another important influence to note is the use of improvisation. By observing videos of Charleston dancers in the 1920s, it is apparent that individuality is a

12. Mark Knowles, *The Wicked Waltz and Other Scandalous Dances: Outrage at Couple Dancing in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries (*Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland & Company Inc., 2009), 137, 139-140.

13. Knowles, 136-137.

key aspect of the style. No two dancers perform the same, and each contributes their own unique flair to the movement. Along with individuality comes the use of improvisation, specifically improvisation breaks, sections of spontaneous movements breaking from the recognized or choreographed steps, which again point to the Charleston's African origins.

The Charleston's European antecedents can be traced to traditional dances across the continent. It not only comes from the Branle, as stated by Staat, but contains elements of the Sailor's Hornpipe and of Spanish dance movements, including *pas de tortilles* (twisting steps,) *pas levés* (lifting movements,) and *Rue de Vache* ("kick of the cow.")[14] An illustration which appeared in an 1866 edition of *Harpers Weekly* shows a gentleman demonstrating movement typical of the Charleston.

Fig. 1 *Pretty Caper* (Knowles) In 1866 a man demonstrates movement that looks like the Charleston, popular in the 1920s.

14. Austin.

As the photo "Pretty Caper" suggests, the Charleston may have been seen on stages as early as the 1860s, however there is much debate in America concerning who earned the credit for popularizing the Charleston on stage. Minstrel team Golden and Grayton used patting (the rhythmical slapping of the body) in their act and claim to be the first to present the Charleston on the American stage in the 1890s. This remains to be proven, but their later vaudeville act did include steps such as the traditional Charleston Bees Knees, featuring patting.[15] Another claim of credit comes from Ned Wayburn, choreographer of the Ziegfield Follies. When hired to work with a chorus boy in New York, he noticed a familiar offbeat movement which he had previously seen when observing "the negro pickaninnies…in their jubilees along the wharves and levees" while travelling in the south.[16] The movement showed the spirit of the post-war period and had not yet been given any value in dancing, so Wayburn adopted it into the Follies repertoire and created a group of steps based on that movement. The number he created was cut from the show after opening night, but Wayburn still laid claim to the dance by offering the following justification in the *Oakland Tribune*,

> Although many have reason to claim origination, development, and titling of the Charleston, I believe that I am the one who has documentary evidence to substantiate his claims. It is not egotistical credit that I have sought for establishing the Charleston to the extent that the American Geographic Society at Washington, D.C., is considering its adoption as the American national dance, but a credit that is due anyone who has successfully assisted in the interpretation of an emotion era in the life of a great nation.[17]

15. Knowles, 142.; The Bees Knees movement involves crouching down and swinging the knees open and closed while simultaneously fanning the hands over them.

16. Knowles, 145.

17. Ned Wayburn, *Oakland Tribune*, July 4, 1996, 46-47, quoted in Knowles, 145.

There are many unknowns about the popularization of the Charleston, however one fact holds true in its wide-spread success. The appearance of all-black musicals gave the dance craze national appeal.

There is evidence that some movements of the Charleston could have been performed on New York stages in the first all-black musical, *Shuffle Along*, as many cast members are credited with introducing it in some capacity. However, *Liza*, the first all-black musical played on a Broadway stage, is the first officially documented musical to incorporate the Charleston. Its movements were then seen in the short run of the musical *How Come?* However, the movement did not truly catch the public eye until the 1923 premiere of *Runnin' Wild*, featuring song writer James P. Johnson's "The Charston," later renamed "The Charleston."[18]

With a debatable history of origins, it comes as no surprise that the Charleston's road to Broadway finds itself spread through a few different stories. One story credits *Runnin Wild*'s writer Flourney Miller with introducing choreographer Lida (Elida) Webb to a few youth that he found dancing on the streets uptown outside the Lincoln Theater. Another credits Webb with learning the steps from her young niece, living uptown in Harlem, the Negro section of New York.[19] Whether it was the writer or choreographer who introduced the Charleston to *Runnin' Wild*, the show's director, George White, was not an instant fan. He debated cutting the number altogether, but audience buzz saved its place in the show. The Charleston lived on to tour the United States, reaching far beyond

18. Knowles, 142.

19. Knowles, 144.

its kickstart in the social scene of New York City, to become a national and, later, international dance craze.

The Charleston's history is multidimensional. With diverse roots tracing to all areas of the world in differing time periods, it is difficult to place the craze of the 1920s into one category of influence. Harlem Renaissance writer Wallace Therman, as quoted in Knowles' investigation, wrote the following,

> Most Negro dances originate in the cane breaks and cotton field settlements. They are introduced into the north by black marathonists and find their way into the theatrical world after they have been seen in some gin dive or cabaret. It is thus indeed hard to give credit where credit is due. Any number of people claim the honor of having originated this or that dance. All may have some ground on which to base their claim, for it is very possible that each one, having seen the raw material, has refined it for stage purposes.[20]

Therman's summation suggests that credit can be claimed by many, as it is completely probable that all drew from the movement's various origins to create their own materials for stage purposes. While taking inspiration from the similarities in its foreign roots, each variation was unique to its creator and therefore each claim boasts a degree of validity.

Dance in the Social Scene

The normalcy that Americans sought in wake of the war was derailed by the passing of the Prohibition Act. They sought to let go, drink, and have fun, but found no venue to fit the need. Thus, came bootlegging, the illegal manufacturing, selling, and transportation of alcohol. But more important to the dance scene came the speakeasies. Named for their entry regulations of whispering passwords and speaking "low" or "easy,"

20. Wallace Therman, *The Collected Writings of Wallace Therman: A Harlem Renaissance Reader* edited by Amritjit Singh and Daniel Scott III (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 72, quoted in Mark Knowles, 147.

speakeasies, nightclubs, honky-tonks, and jook-joints provided an underground outlet for alcohol consumption out of the law's reach.[21] Illegal liquor trades were claimed to go hand in hand with jazz music and dancing. That claim reigned true as these clubs replaced saloons as the center of social activity.

As women ventured out of the home to explore drinking and leisure activities, the social scene really took off. Jazz bands featured in the clubs introduced new forms of entertainment in the perfect atmosphere for social dancing. Venues such as nightclubs and speakeasies not only provided a floor for social dancing, but for performance as well. Some of the era's most notable dancing acts and celebrities were first seen at these establishments putting their own flair on the new spectacles they had seen in the big musicals on Broadway.[22] However, dancing was not exclusive to these exciting and rebellious establishments. The 1920s also saw the rise of dance halls. Unlike speakeasies, dance halls held residence in higher class establishments such as hotel ballrooms and attracted crowds from out of town that moved from hall to hall, resulting in a lack of regulars. For the working-class individual, social dance became part of everyday life and provided a sense of inclusion, therefore making the individual socially significant. Journalist Gregory Mason explains it as such, "At work he and she are just numbers on the payroll, cogs in the human machinery of a vast office or vaster factory. But in the dance-halls such youth and maidens became somebodies."[23] Dance was not exclusive to

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21. Ralph G. Giordano, *Satan in the Dance Hall: Rev. John Roach Straton, Social Dancing, and Morality in 1920s New York City* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2008), 10-11.

22. Knowles, 147.

23. Giordano, 175

any class, gender, race, or degree of talent. The craze of the 1920s provided an outlet for individual expression, celebration, and socialization for all who chose to participate.

As dance spots and practices grew in popularity, a new aspect of dance was introduced to the social scene: competition. It can be predicted that frequenters of the dance scene built stamina in their leisure practices and were able to dance for increasingly longer amounts of time. Hourly dance contests were held for the pleasure and satisfaction of the contestants. Amateur dancers, probably unemployed youth seeking gain from their leisure, sought prize money, food, and gifts. On March 30, 1923, in pursuit of establishing an American record for nonstop dancing, Alma Cummings won the first dance marathon at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City after wearing out six partners over twenty-seven hours of dancing.[24] After Cummings, other dancers set out to beat records, and competition carved its way into the culture of the 1920s. Social dancing was changing from a shared leisure activity to a medium for rivalry and spectacle.

The spectacle of dance marathons gave leisure dance a shift from celebrating the spirit of the times to dancing for a sense of accomplishment. Not only did the marathons become a competition for personal gain, but the spectacle drew crowds, making it less of a social practice and more of a theatrical production. Marathon promoters rented dance spaces to produce the competitions. Dancers did not play characters, they were themselves, but as marathons gained media attention and spectators sought entertainment from the events, promoters would begin to create stories for the dancers. They took the

24. Carol Martin, "Reality Dance: American Dance Marathons" In *Ballroom, Boogie, Shimmy Sham, Shake: A Social and Popular Dance Reader* edited by Julie Malnig 93-107 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 93-94.

lives of competitors and produced fictional dramas. Marathons became staged, and promoters even showcased the recovery of injured contestants through glass walls where costumed staff would play nurses to aid in the spectacle.[25] Dance marathons took the leisure activity out of social dancing and skewed the lines between that and performance.

While dance marathons may have masked the lines between fiction and reality, other competitions of the time boasted a performance career for its contestants. Charleston contests raised winner's prize offerings from cash to performance contracts. Preliminary contests were held in various cities, and the winners would face off in state championships. Young hopefuls entered for a chance to ignite their performance careers. Two girls who began their careers as Texas State Charleston Champions were Ginger Rogers and Joan Crawford.[26] After winning multiple contests and titles, both Rogers and Crawford had successful careers on Broadway before gracing the big screen to become Hollywood stars. Though many competitors were of the young and hopeful category, others came from completely different social and economic statuses.

No matter their status or reason for entry, Charleston competitors shared common ground with others indulging in the thrill of the times. Some danced for prize, some for fame, some for self-entertainment, and others for relaxation and so much more. While it may seem that the social dance scene was popular and widely accepted among all who embraced the post-war spirit of the jazz age, the case was not so. It is true that dancing in the 1920s garnered much attention from its integration into popular society, but with the attention and drastic social change came much opposition.

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25. Carol Martin, 94, 98-101.

26. Knowles, 150.

Society Reacts

Objections to social dance appeared in multiple mediums from newspaper editorials and magazine articles to religious sermons. Most attacks focused on the suggestive nature of the movement; however other objections were rooted in racist responses to the origins of the dance. Louis Chalif, a highly respected dance teacher of the period, is quoted as saying the Charleston was "of heathen African origins." Charleston, South Carolina, which held the Charleston's namesake, even declared dissociation with the dance that caused "mortification" in its citizens.[27] Among the most outrageous and blistering assaults on social dance were those by Reverend Revel Alcorn Adams,

> In choosing the dance as one of his surest, truest and most potent instruments of destruction – the destruction of the bodies, minds, lives and souls, of men and women, the devil chose well…[Adams] blamed social dancing as the root cause of marriage infidelity, promiscuity, loss of physical strength, early death, and even abortion.[28]

While social dance gathered much opposition throughout the decade, there is no denying that dance and society in the 1920s were influences on one another.

Social dancing caused concern in the medical community. Diagnoses, as they related to social dance, were given in the forms of water on the knee, twisted ligaments, sprained or strained ankles and backs, fallen arches, foot deformities, weight loss, depleted energy, hernia, internal injuries, and over strained heart. Doctors and physicians

27. Knowles, 168.

28. Rev. Dr. R. A. Adams, *The Social Dance* (Kansas City: R. A. Adams, 1921), quoted in Giordano, 49.

warned of "The Charleston Knee" and "Charleston Feet."[29] They believed that shocks of constant jumping could displace the heart and other organs. Paralysis and total collapse of the body were other common effects. Dr. Harry Gilbert examined the pulse of a dancer in one of New York's hottest night clubs. His conclusion was that high changes in heart-rate from eighty pulses per minute before dancing to one hundred and thirty-four after could cause permanent damage to the heart.[30] Fears were not only for health concerns, but of physical damage as well. Physicians warned that the dance could lead to malformations of the skeletal system, affecting women's beauty and creating "…a race of knock-kneed, pigeon-toed, plier-handled females."[31] Not only was it seen as a hazard to oneself, but the constant kicking to the side caused dancers to harm one another and tear each other's stockings.[32] Some believe it to be good self-inflicted osteopathic treatment but could not grasp how one would think it an enjoyable activity, while others opposed it for reasons of morality.

Reverend John Roach Straton's tenure paralleled the rise of social dancing in New York City. He referred to New York City as "a modern Babylon," a comparison to the Biblical city associated with destruction, pride, and idolatry. Throughout the 1920s, Straton commented on and against degrading morals and corruption in society. As detailed by Ralph G. Giordano in introducing his novel which focuses on Rev. Straton's war on morality,

29. Knowles, 169.

30. Knowles, 169.

31. Knowles, 170.

32. Knowles, 169.

> Straton's specific objections included card playing, jazz music, Broadway theater, divorce, low-cut dresses, romance novels, Museum of Natural History, boxing. Modern art, and even poodle dogs. But his most savage attacks and condemnations were against social dancing and New York's commercial dance halls.[33]

Straton stressed that no one loved a good time or believed in innocent joy more than him, and he delighted to see others enjoying themselves. However, the list of recreations that he approved of was brief. He opposed most ways of amusement in New York, especially the theater and social dancing, calling them "expressions of degeneration in human society[,]" arguing that the dances took their names and movements from lower animals.[34]

Straton's anti-dance sentiments circulated through newspapers and self-written books; however, his most prominent method of delivery was through sermons. His focus was on "The Dance of Death," a phrase that titled one of his published books on the issue, *The Dance of Death: Should Christians Indulge?*[35] Inspired by medieval allegoric themes of plagues and war, this ominous title spawned in the aftermath of World War I and the influenza epidemic which claimed more than 200 million lives in a matter of four years. The popular medieval mythical belief was that the skeletons of those dead from war would rise from their graves and temp the living to dance, which would result in death for all who participated. Straton looked to the past and believed this, that "[e]very war was followed by immortality and the greatest war of all time [was] being followed by the widest wave of immortality in the history of the abominations of the modern

33. Giordano, xii

34. Giordano, 30.

35. Giordano, xiii.

dance."[36] He toured the country, sharing his oppositions, in hopes of gaining followers in the fight against the immoralities of social dance.

Straton searched for Satan in the dance halls and preached on his findings. He wore disguises and visited the halls to observe the very happenings that he despised. In one unnamed dance hall, Straton reported an estimated 5,000 patrons engaging in appalling actions not only on the dance floor but around it as well.[37] Couples standing and sitting, dancing and idle, performed acts deemed indecent by the preacher. In describing the history of social dance and how it continuously brought couples closer in proximity, Straton stated,

> And so, a little thrill in the Virginia Reel or the stately Minuet, and then a profounder pleasure in the witchery of the waltz, and then a tighter hug in the tango, and then a closer inter-lacing of limbs, and then the sweep of passion in the 'cheek to cheek,' and then 'corsets off!' that breast may touch breast, and then – Hell![38]

The actions observed and noted by Straton were labeled acts of widespread social deterioration. While he preached his anti-dance sermons across the country, his observations came only from New York dance halls, so how could this phenomenon be considered widespread?

The most notable dances of the decade, deemed scandalous by Straton and the like, were introduced to the public eye on the Broadway stage. Gilda Gray coined The Shimmy in 1922 along with Mae West and the Ziegfeld Follies. Ann Pennington

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36. Rev. John Roach Straton, *The Dance of Death: Should Christians Indulge?* rev. ed. (New York: Religious Literature Department Calvary Baptist Church, 1929), Giordano, 42-43.

37. Giordano, 31.

38. Straton, quoted in Giordano, 48.

showcased the Black Bottom to audiences of George White's *Scandals* in 1926. As noted before, the Charleston hit the Broadway stage in the 1923 hit *Runnin' Wild*. As publicity grew around the dances and various pressures to take action were placed on government officials, the buzz of the dance prompted legislation. In April of 1927, New York governor Al Smith signed the Theatrical Padlock Bill Act, more commonly known as the Wales Act or Wales Legislation. This act put in place the right for police officials to padlock theaters and arrest participants of shows who refused official warnings to remove scenes that were labeled obscene, indecent, immoral, or impure.[39] In 1928, *Pleasure Man* ran for two shows before over fifty members of the cast and production staff were arrested and made news headlines. One of the actresses was Mae West, who had been sentenced to "ten days in the workhouse" for her role in *Sex* the same month the legislation was enacted.[40] These dance scandals and their corresponding headlines gave Broadway the publicity needed to produce a great societal impact.

In the same way that dance influenced society through its role on Broadway, it impacted and was influenced by audiences of other popular entertainment and media outlets. Dancing on the movie screen was replicated from that which was seen in the dance halls. However, certain dance professionals believed that the standardization of social dance could be attributed in part to movies and the radio. Fenton Bott, Dance Masters of America Organization president, claimed that because of on-screen dancing, "there [were] no longer different ways of dancing." He backed this claim with the

39. Giordano, 61.

40. Giordano, 61.

observance that dance music was broadcast to a vast amount of people. [41] The same music reached the same people who watched dancing in the movies and then replicated it at home. While these entertainment mediums helped to spread the act of social dancing and brought the same movements to each who watched and listened, it was still social dance and music from recreation venues that gave rise to the movement and music which was showcased in these films and played on the radios.

Social dancing styles are also recorded in association with the world of sports.

Fig. 2 *The Charleston as an aid to the game* (Szypszak) Vivian Marinelli teaches the Charleston to basketball players of Washington D.C.'s Palace Club as part of their training regimen.

41. "Dancing Standardized by Movies and Radio," *New York Times,* August 25, 1927, 12, quoted in Giordano, 118.

As discussed previously in the chapter, doctors noted the health benefits of practicing the Charleston; when done correctly and with precision it could be a great addition to any workout. Football players and wrestlers practiced the Charleston in their cleats as part of their training regimen. As shown in Figure 2, Vivian Marinelli taught the Charleston to basketball players of Washington D.C.'s Palace club league in hopes of refining their footwork. Photo sources also site instances of Washington D.C. baseball players taking inspiration from dancers on the field.[42]

Social dancing shifted daily life and made an undeniable impact on society in the 1920s. Though questions of morality lingered throughout the country, there is no question that the post-war era had an exciting and fresh energy influenced by and reflected in social dancing practices. This energy not only showcased the freedom of war, but inspired change for all citizens.

42. Lara Szypszak, "Dance Moves in D.C. and Beyond," *Picture This: Library of Congress Prints & Photos* (blog), February 2, 2017, https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2017/02/dance-moves-in-d-c-and-beyond/.

CHAPTER TWO- WOMEN, THE FLAPPER, AND DANCE

Women were the dominant force of reformation from 1900 to 1920. They sought to wipe out prostitution, abolish the saloon, and raise the social standards of men to their own.[43] They had been arrested for smoking cigarettes in public, using profanity, appearing on public beaches without stockings, driving automobiles without a man beside them, wearing "outlandish" attire such as shorts, slacks, and men's hats, and for not wearing a corset. As the world went to war, women were forced to fill holes in the workplace, and at the war's conclusion, they made up twenty percent of the workforce.[44] They turned focus from changing the standards of men to seeking change for themselves.

On June 4, 1919, during the sixty-sixth Congress of the United States, a Joint Resolution was brought forth which proposed an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women. The 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified on August 18, 2020 stating,

> The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.[45]

After fighting for more than a year for ratification, the Women's Suffrage Association closed and formed the League of Women's Voters whose purpose was to encourage

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43. George E. Mowry, *The Twenties: Fords, Flappers & Fanatics*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 173.

44. Geoffrey Perret, *America in the Twenties: A History,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 157.

45. "19th Amendment to the US Constitution: Women's Right to Vote," *National Archives and Record Administration*, accessed March 31, 2019, https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/19th-amendment.

women to put into practice the rights which they had fought so hard to win.[46] Even with these efforts, there were still women who did not exercise their rights for whatever reason.

In other efforts to make changes in favor of women, the National Women's Party was created and fought for the Equal Rights Amendment. This group of mostly middle-class, college educated women living in comfortable homes fought for and were dedicated to ideas that sounded promising but were not favorable for women in that specific time. Equality in the workplace meant that women would work in the same capacity as men. They would spend long hours in harsh conditions which they were not accustomed to and from which they could not be protected. Furthermore, the main concern was the loss of maternity insurance and mother's pensions. For these reasons, the push for the Equal Rights Amendment came to a standstill when women social workers, and others who were aware of the concerns it raised for working women, fought against its passing.[47]

Sex had long been a taboo subject. American parents, at the time, did not speak with their children on the subject. The men who went to war became more knowledgeable on the practice, while women mostly received advice from one another.[48] In this new society, the automobile created a new form of privacy which gave rise to an informal dating method between classes and promoted sexual freedom. As sex was practiced more freely, the need to separate sexual activity with procreation became a

46. Perret, 157.

47. Perret, 155.

48. Giordano, 121.

major topic in society and in politics. According to a *Time Magazine* article in 1923, the United States was the only civilized country with legal restrictions on the release of information about contraception and its prevention.[49] These restrictions dated back to legislation and congressional acts from 1873. Well through the 1920s, nineteen states outlawed contraception and the release of information regarding the topic, twenty-five were ambiguous on the topic, and four held no legislation, but none legalized any type of birth control. In December of 1923 the American Birth Control League opened clinics in Brooklyn and Manhattan ultimately administering advice to over nine-hundred women, mostly immigrants, in one year's time.[50] These pursuits and resulting legislations were all great strides for women. However, the more recognizable changes that took place in the post-war society were evident in fashion and in the lifestyle of the younger generation.

A Different Kind of Feminism

Feminism in the post-war era had a focus on more than fighting for legislation and equality. Bruce Bliven applied the word feminism in saying that women had won a victory in changing their roles in society through fashion, sexual freedom, language, and public behavior. He states,

> Women have resolved that they are just as good as men, and intend to be treated so. They don't mean to have any more unwanted children. They don't intend to be debarred from any profession or occupation, which they choose to enter. They clearly mean…that in the great game of sexual selection they shall no longer be forced to play the role, simulated or real, of helpless quarry.[51]

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49. "Birth Control," *Time*, December 17, 1923, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,8816,717225,00.html, quoted in Giordano, 99.

50. Giordano, 101.

51. Bruce Bliven, "Flapper Jane," *New Republic*, September 9, 1925.

The changing roles of women in post war society of the early 1900s accompanied by the adaptations in fashion and the new lifestyle practiced by the youth reflected the transition between the Victorian Era and Modern Times and the implementation of this type of feminism.

In the late 1800s, the role of the idealistic, pure American female belonged to the Gibson Girl. Women were expected to dress appropriately in skirts covering the ankles and corsets cinching the waist. Their long hair was done up to show off the ears and neck.[52] After the war, women discarded their petticoats, unlaced their corsets, and left other restricting garments in the past for freer attire that would facilitate movement and allow them to participate in new activities such as tennis, golf, riding bicycles, swimming, driving automobiles, and social dancing. In fact, the woman namely responsible for changing the fashion image in the early nineteenth century was Irene Castle. She and her husband Vernon Castle were a famous dancing couple. Irene preferred her hair in a short, bobbed style with a beaded headband or Dutch cap. She also had her dresses cut short and ditched the corset to make her clothing more suitable for dancing.[53] However, this new style was popularized in the 1920s as the iconic look of the flapper.

The term flapper, as used to describe a certain type of woman in the 1920s, is much like the Charleston in that its origins have been claimed in varying ways. It was coined in Great Britain during World War I as a word referring to a young girl with unbuckled galoshes that flapped when she walked. Other British uses of the term include

52. Giordano, 98.

53. Giordano, 98.

flapper as meaning "a young bird, especially a wild duck, just able to fly," and as a sporting term meaning "young duck." However, the derivation of the word was most likely to describe the young women's arms as they danced.[54] The first application of the term is credited to author F. Scott Fitzgerald in his series of short stories titled *Flappers and Philosophers* which was published in 1920. Fitzgerald is also credited with naming the era the Jazz Age in his novel, *This Side of Paradise*. While all of these definitions and derivations give answers to why the term was used, they do nothing to tell of who the flapper was.

According to the Flapper Dictionary, a flapper is defined as

> [an] ultra-modern, young girl, full of pep and life, beautiful (naturally or artificially), blasé, imitative, and intelligent to a degree, who is about to bloom into a period of womanhood and believes her sex has been and will continue to be, emancipated to a level higher than most mortals have been able to attain.[55]

Other sources define flapper as "a very immoral young girl in her early teen years", and

> [O]ne of a long series of jocular terms for a young and somewhat foolish girl, full of wild surmises and inclined to revolt against the precepts and admonitions of her elders.[56]

The flapper was the enduring and iconic image of the 1920s. She was independent-minded and rebellious. She did not conform to the expected roles of women. She adopted modern fashions, used makeup, smoked, drank alcohol, and danced. Other progressive

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54. Knowles, 155.

55. Tom Dalzell, *Flappers 2 Rappers: American Youth Slang* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1996), 22, quoting *The Flapper's Dictionary: As Compiled by One of Them* (Plattsburg, NY: The Imperial Press, 1922), quoted in Knowles, 155.

56. Kathleen Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance: National Prohibition and Jazz Age Literature, 1920-1933*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 71, quoted in Giordano, 99.

thinkers believed she was a savior to lead society into the twenty-first century, but the establishment saw her as the downfall of society.[57] The concerns raised about youth paralleled those oppositions to social dance in terms of morality. While many claims about the flapper and the youth of the era are true, these assumptions and assertations by the older generation often came from misunderstandings about the intentions and driving force behind the actions of the youth.

The youth had been devasted by the first world war. Both sexes were deployed to foreign lands to fight and work for a cause that changed their views on the world and challenged everything that they knew. John F. Carter expressed this mindset in a 1920 article stating,

> I would like to observe that the older generation had certainly pretty well ruined this world before passing it on to us. They give us this Thing, knocked to pieces, leaky, red-hot, threatening to blow up; and then they are surprised that we don't accept it with the same attitude or pretty, decorous enthusiasm with which they received it….[58]

The youth rebelled against the values of previous generations because they were struggling to regain what was lost. They could not look back to the lifestyle that they lived before the war. They had to move past the devastation to pursue ideals and lifestyles that would drive society out of the war and into a new and prosperous energy.

Dance As An Escape

Zelda Sayre met her husband while dancing. F. Scott Fitzgerald had just returned from war and stumbled into a social club where he found his muse. She was the model

57. Knowles, 155.

58. John F. Carter, "These Wild Young People, By One of Them," *Atlantic Monthly*, 126, September 1920, 301-304 http://eagle.clarion.edu/~faculty/tpfannestiel/carter.html, quoted in Knowles, 154.

Flapper of the time, admired and loved by everyone who knew her, or at least felt as though they did. As Zelda Fitzgerald indulged in this lavish lifestyle that came with being the wife of an author labeled the father of the Jazz Age, she could not help but feel that something was missing. As a young girl she had dreams and aspirations that pushed her along. As a young adult she felt trapped in the world and work of her husband, especially as he developed a drinking problem and began blaming her for dancing all day.[59] An extra-marital affair on the part of F. Scott Fitzgerald caused a breaking point and eventually ended his marriage to Zelda.

Zelda Fitzgerald was then free to claim her identity as an artist away from her husband's influence. She committed herself to developing internal resources and worked towards ideals valued for more than male approval. She tackled life in a new and direct way that differed from her perceptions of being the model flapper.[60] In fact, Zelda had very strong opinions about who the flapper was, and why she no longer wished to be labeled as such. While she believed the flapper to be an invaluable cup-bearer to the arts, she thought this contribution to be involuntary and in her own field, as her art was the art of being young, being lovely, and being an object.[61] She often used three characteristics to describe the flapper. She was an object, was male identified, and had tremendous vitality. Zelda believed that everything a flapper did was for appearances and to draw the attention of a male. Flappers had no meaningful relationships with other women.

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59. Rachel Vigier, *Gestures of Genius: Women, Dance, and the Body*, (Stratford, Ontario: The Mercury Press, 1994), 73.

60. Vigier, 75.

61. Vigier, 75.

According to Zelda, they were happy with hating other women. However, as her marriage came to fault, and she longed for change, Zelda sought female companionship. She found that through following her passion of pursuing dance.

As a child Zelda showed promise in her ballet lessons. Labeled a belle of her town, the newspapers reported that she may have danced like Anna Pavlova, a popular prima ballerina of Russia, if she hadn't been distracted by so many of her admirers.[62] When she felt lost in the world of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda returned to her first success to regain her identity. She worked furiously and practiced intensively every day. Her aspirations were clear; she wanted a professional position in a ballet company. Her instructor, Ergorova, who Zelda admired and loved, believed she was capable of achieving this goal. While it is unknown whether or not she was actually capable of dancing professionally, it is evident that dance provided Zelda with the means to reinvent herself.[63]

Dance brought Zelda meaningful work and relationships with other women. It reversed the passivity of her marriage and replaced the vitality which was lost while living in her husband's world.[64] It provided Zelda a new will to speak and gave depth to her life. She struggled. It was the good type of struggle that gave meaning to her art. Her art displayed a conflict between the energy of creation (her ambition, talent, and individual power) and the energy of relation (her need for love, companionship, family,

62. Vigier, 80.

63. Vigier, 80.

64. Vigier, 77.

and to create private relationship.)[65] Dancing also cultivated within Zelda the structure as well as the physical and emotional strength she needed to ultimately leave her husband, put herself back together, unlock her imagination, and inspire her writing. It is astounding to realize what a powerful force of nature the art of dance, and its dancer, can be.

65. Vigier, 81.

CHAPTER THREE- CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

On April 12, 2019 I presented the choreographic component of my research in *Contemporary Connections: A Dance Research Showcase* sponsored by the Western Kentucky University Department of Theatre and Dance. This presentation included a spoken portion where I shared about my research and its influence on my choreographic process. I will discuss this process more in depth in the following sections.

Back to Charleston

"Back to Charleston," set to Coon Sanders' Original Nighthawk Orchestra's "I'm Gonna Charleston Back to Charleston," is a depiction of the energy and youthfulness that permeated throughout the 1920s. The movements which comprised this piece were taken from the 1920's dance vocabulary. I learned these dance steps through YouTube videos which detailed specific steps as passed down through the generations. I picked up the other movements by watching videos of dancers in the 1920s both from leisure and movie musicals. I also had previous knowledge of the more well-known steps such as the Charleston learned throughout my dance education.

Nearly one hundred years of time has passed from the 1920s until now. Within those years, dance as an art and practice has undergone many transformations. Each decade of the 20th century has introduced a new style to jazz dance, and to this day, dancers, teachers, and choreographers are inspired to create new and exciting works unlike any that have been done before. While jazz dance evolved and further developed during the past ten decades to become the genre we know and cherish, this passage of time created a barrier between my dancers and the movements iconic of the 1920s. The technical training engrained in the muscles of these dancers hindered their ability to let

loose and move freely as the citizens had when these movements were first introduced. My dance training and choreographic eye also created barriers to authenticity in the movement. Before adding my dancers into the piece, I had already stripped away some of the leisure aspect of 1920's social dance. My choreographic process focused on creating an interesting and performance worthy work that would require structure and synchronicity that was not characteristic of social dancing in the 1920s.

I built this piece, as I would any other choreographic work, by utilizing formations, timing, phrasing, levels, and various other compositional elements. This structure is not what would have been seen in speakeasies or social clubs which hosted the leisure dance scene. My piece would compare more to a choreographed dance on Broadway or on the movie screen. However, I still wanted to embody the freedom and individuality of those who danced for leisure. When teaching the movements, I had to focus on details in order for my dancers to learn the execution, but this posed a challenge down the line when I needed them to focus more on the feeling and style and less on the technical details.

As in most choreographic works, I drilled my dancers to hit musical cues and travel through space in the same way, but over analyzation and questioning body placement gave the piece too much structure. By the week of the concert I had to drill relaxation and individuality rather than synchronicity. I showed my dancers videos of dance in the 1920s, which I had done a few times before. However, after having had time to become more comfortable with the movements, they began to understand the qualities that made the dancers of the 1920s different from them. As they dropped focus on being perfect, let loose, stopped looking in the mirror, and put on fun, bright costumes, they

truly began to embody the 1920s. On April 12th my dancers performed with smiles on their faces and embraced the spirit of the 20s. Of course, with this separation of one hundred years, they would never look like the same dancers that previously shocked the world, but I am proud of the work they did in capturing those qualities and making the choreography their own.

Her Perfect

I was first introduced to the Gibson Girl during my professional performance contract of *Mary Poppins* the musical in the summer of 2018. Set in London, England in the year 1910, the female characters take inspiration from the picturesque Gibson Girl. For the opening scene I was adorned in a long, fitted skirt which, without the height of my character heels, would have completely covered my feet and touched the ground. The skirt was matched to a double-breasted jacket which was fitted to show off my corseted waist, had I been wearing a corset. A large, wide-brimmed sunhat topped a loosely tied bun centered in a voluminous pouf of my long, curly hair.

While brainstorming ideas, I thought about my personal choreographic style. My choreography is often minimal, focusing on emotion, character, and radiating energy rather than creating a lot of movement phrases. I wanted this piece to be inspired by the 1920s yet still be contemporary. As I experimented with manipulations of current and technical movements with the flair of the 1920s, I looked to my research for character and emotional inspiration. Zelda Fitzgerald stood out, as her story was highly influenced by dance. I also realized that my style would fit well with a study of gesture and positioning. When I read of the pure, idealistic American female of the late 1800s being the Gibson Girl, I was immediately drawn to that storyline as I knew of her styling and

aura. The movements for this piece were created through examination of photos depicting the perfect American woman before the 1920s, the Gibson Girl, and during the 1920s, the flapper.[66] I also utilized the experimentation I did with added 1920's quality and flair to more contemporary movements.

The mysterious, yet serene plinking of George Gershwin's "Prelude No. 2" set the perfect atmosphere for this tale of transformation. I created "Her Perfect" to depict the transition of the iconic, perfect, idealistic female from Gibson Girl to flapper. I did not realize this until now, but the story is a struggle of being stuck. My character was stuck in the Gibson Girl label, then stuck in the flapper label, and fought to break free from that to find her own definition of perfect. This fight and the break from the flapper lifestyle drew inspiration from Zelda Fitzgerald's use of dance to leave her situation and seek a more meaningful lifestyle with rich female companionship.

Following the performance, I realized that this piece could have been titled "Stuck in Their Perfect." The soloist was stuck in the body of a Gibson Girl. As she moved through the poses, her gaze scanned the black space that was the audience. Her expression was one of longing. She inhaled deeply in attempts to cinch her waist as a corset would have done without the effort. As she collapsed from the exhaustion of holding herself in, she regained composure to become stuck again. Her gestures then experimented with those of the flapper, which caused her to pick herself back up before falling into her old pattern. The second half explored gestures, movements, and poses of the flapper, as well as 1920's stylistic elements in contemporary movements. At the conclusion, her movements became more dance like. More continuous movements and

66. See Appendix One and Two

less posing replicated Zelda Fitzgerald's use of dance to break out of her mold. A final reaching gesture represented the longing for meaningful relationships that awaited her in this new lifestyle.

Choosing to create five minutes of slow, minimal movement for one person is a risk. Will this single body on a large stage be able to capture the attention of each audience member and keep it throughout the piece's entirety? I believe that this ability lies within many factors. It depends on the story that is being told and who is telling it. In the case of this work, I was able to explain the story and the inspiration and motivation behind the movement before it was presented to the audience. They were given the information needed to interpret the work and understand the dancer rather than trying to figure out what they were watching with no prior information. Another factor which gave me confidence in presenting a work of this style was who would be performing it. Standing at five foot eleven inches, my soloist can fill a stage with her limbs far better than myself at five foot four inches (on a good day at the doctor's office) could, before taking into account emotion and projection of energy.

While I was confident in the movement and in my soloist's abilities to carry the story and attract attention, it was suggested that I consider adding another element of presentation to further reinforce my inspiration. This excited me as it could aid in the slightly haunting image that my dancer was creating as she felt stuck in each of these poses. The weekend before my piece was to be performed, I created a video which played through the photos used as inspiration in time with how they were choreographed into movement. This video was to be projected behind my dancer to showcase the images

which inspired her movement. However, I was unable to utilize my background images as the projector was unavailable during our technical rehearsal and performance.

Again, it was suggested that another element be added, this time another dancer. There were some interesting and good things happening when I added a second dancer to the latter half of what once was a solo. We experimented with moments of synchronicity and opposition. While there was nothing wrong with what the second dancer brought to the table, a duet just simply was not what this piece was intended to be and did not carry the same intention as it did when performed by only one dancer. I made the decision to have this performed as a solo and titled it "Her Perfect" to symbolize that this character was not looking for what society deemed as perfect but was searching for her own definition of perfect. Through this I learned that it is okay to take suggestions and experiment with the ideas of your mentors, however, it is also okay to be true to your intentions and not questions your work just because someone else believes it may work better in a different way.

Time: An Ongoing Struggle

A flurry of ideas matched with a limited amount of time ultimately restricted the work I was able to produce. Once I was able to begin working with my dancers, it was as if the relationship between my ideas and the time I had to foster those ideas was one set for failure. In a perfect world I would have presented more choreography on April the 12th. In fact, one week before the concert, my work consisted of three parts, "Back to Charleston," "Her Perfect" (which was not yet titled), and a third piece which was an extension of the solo. This work followed the soloist as she then searched for a new lifestyle and new relationships with women outside of the flapper lifestyle.

After finishing my first two pieces, I had choreographed around three minutes of an upbeat and more modern jazz song titled “Cantaloupe Island” by Herbie Hancock. After the soloist reached out for companionship, she would have walked off stage as a group dressed in black tops and shorts (just as she was) entered walking as pedestrians. The movement inspiration was similar to that of the latter half of the solo in that there was a 1920’s flair and inspiration added to modern movements. This time, however, there was more play of breaking into stylized movements and then breaking out again into modern or pedestrian movements. I choreographed the amount which I had planned, but it did not seem finished. With so little time to polish this piece as well as the other two which were finished and had been for some time, I knew that I could not add more when what I had already choreographed on my dancers did not satisfy me. I made the decision to cut this last section, and it relieved me greatly to do so.

Throughout this choreographic journey, I learned so many valuable lessons to take forward as I continue to learn, create, and teach. While they say that history repeats itself, it will never be replicated in the same way. However, I found that looking to history for inspiration created something unique and interesting that was relatable to today’s audience while still showing an essence of history. I learned that breaking a dancers’ technical training is one of the most difficult things in the world. Many of us have trained nearly our entire lives to hold our alignment, straighten our legs, hold our arms in the perfect placement, and execute movements exactly how they are taught. It was a struggle to break my dancers of their technique and ask them to, ironically enough, forget about looking perfect.

Probably the most important lesson I learned is that when I choreograph, it is my work, and it is okay to stay true to my work. I learned that it is okay to take suggestions and experiment with the ideas of your mentors or others whose opinion you value and trust, however, it is also okay to be true to your intentions and not question your work just because someone else believes it may work better in a different way. In this same way, it is also okay to look at your work, know that it is not what you intended and leave it behind. This was not failure, as I may have thought it to be a few times in the process, but growth in my abilities to recognize that quality over quantity applies in choreography as well. These and other valuable moments are why I chose to do both written and choreographic components in my research.

CONCLUSION

As we move closer to the year 2020, it is intriguing to study the happenings of society almost one hundred years ago. Dance was an integral player in shaping the energy of the era. It was born from interactions of movement between emancipated slaves and European immigrants. It was practiced for both performance and leisure. Along with other freedoms found in a postwar society, dance helped the youth to move forward from devastation and embrace the new and exciting world unfolding before them after World War I. Dance influenced fashion and garnered controversy greater than a dancer of today could imagine. Throughout the last one hundred years, society and dance have changed greatly but not all sentiments are lost.

An interesting part of my research process was discovering the similarities that are shared between society in the 1920s and the present. More specifically, I discovered the similarities between flappers and millennials. It seems that each time I open Facebook, there is another person from an older generation who is complaining about millennials and how they, generalizing each millennial into a collective pronoun, are ruining their lives or are not fit to take on the adult world. Youth of today experience new freedoms that the older generation did not have as they were growing up. We have access to technologies and media outlets that provide information or entertainment at our fingertips. Some of these technologies, like Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and the Google Home, do not even require users to lift a finger; we simply speak and receive answers. Thus, older generations scorn millennials for not working for anything. Like the older generations of the 1920s, they believe that these new freedoms and inventions take away from real-world experiences and put values in the wrong place.

As the Charleston, the Black Bottom, and other dances took to the stage and movie screen, the entire country danced along to popular music heard on the radio and in social clubs. In a similar way, it seems that new dance movements are breaking the internet every few weeks. Today, and in recent years, those widespread dance crazes are the Floss, the Whip and Nae Nae, the Dougie, etc., and the newest craze as of mid-April 2019, the Woah. While none of these popular and heavily broadcast dances have garnered oppositions for morality or scandal issues, many people believe them to be foolish. More promiscuous dance movements are practiced in private and less publicized settings. Additionally, the creation and use of slang today parallels that of the 1920s.

Through my research I have gained new knowledge of an era. For the longest time I have said that I love the 20s. I love the dance style. I love the fashion. I love the whole aesthetic. However, there was so much of which I was unaware when it comes to how things really happened in the 1920s. First, I was unaware of the rich history of the Charleston. It is a movement that is used often in stylized jazz or tap dance pieces which many dancers recognize as an iconic movement of the 1920s and is often associated with the flapper. I knew from conducting research and speaking about history in my jazz dance classes that jazz dance began from vernacular movements of African origin, but the Charleston was a melting pot of influences.

Researching this topic also gave me a new perspective about those who danced in the 1920s. I was aware that flappers could be seen as scandalous because they changed their appearances and showed more skin than any one large group of women dared to before them. However, the amount of backlash and opposition that grew from dance movements was so surprising to me. The fact that one man was so opposed to social

dancing that he toured the country preaching that the devil was working within those who danced and that they were going to die is absolutely astounding to me. These dancers had to be strong-willed and uninterested in the opinions of others. I admire their dedication to an art which was mostly practiced for leisure. In the case of performers, their dedication went far beyond what I can imagine as many were even arrested for showcasing these so-called scandalous actions on public stages.

It amazes me how looking back at society, with nearly one hundred years of development between us, can influence my work and ideas in such profound ways. I was able to create interesting movement combinations and a story which not only represented history but could be applied to the present as well. People are constantly worried about what society believes and says to be perfect, especially with the influence of social media. We get stuck in these expectations. I believe taking influence from flappers and other youth of the 1920s would be beneficial to us as a society. They were not concerned with the opinions of their elders or of those with moral oppositions. They danced freely and made the world their own without hesitation or acknowledgment of those who did not support them. I have found that it is important to look to our past in order to understand our present. I am grateful to have learned so much about a society which has now influenced my work, ideas, and understanding of my art.

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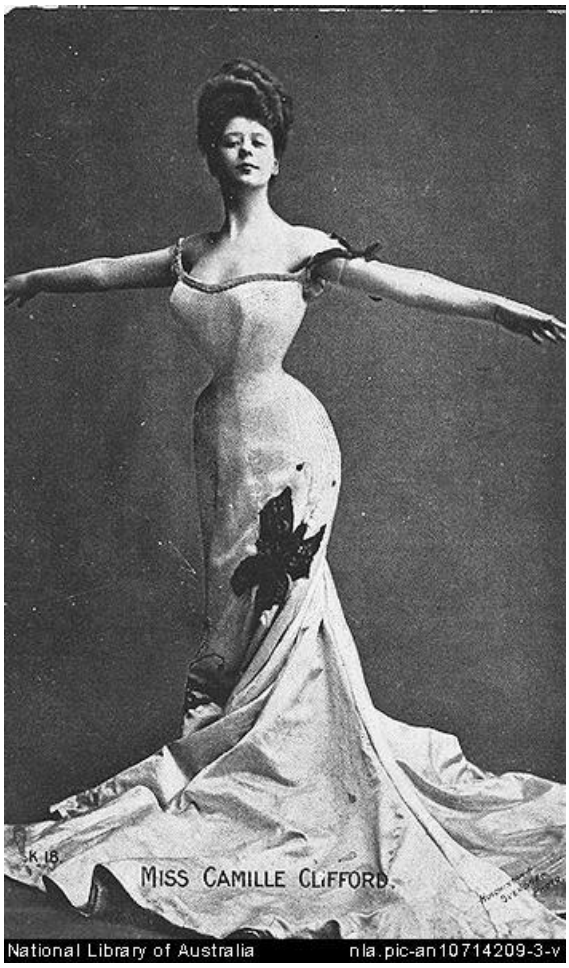
APPENDIX ONE- GIBSON GIRLS:
A SELECTION OF PHOTOS UTILIZED IN CHOREOGRAPHY



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